

# SOCIAL ACTION

DECEMBER 1952

*Bombay Labour*

*Jesuit Republics ?*

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# SOCIAL ACTION

VOL. 2 NO. 9

DECEMBER 1952

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## HERE AND THERE

### *Talks*

In the course of this month, Catholic India will have splendid opportunities to discuss social problems. Madras is setting up all kinds of platforms for all kinds of speakers. The most solemn gathering will be the International Conference of Social Work which will discuss methods of raising the standard of life in South-East Asia. Catholic delegates will be numerous ; we are not only interested in promoting corporal works of mercy but are fully aware of the dictum that conditions of life affect the practice of virtue. In India there are millions that are so miserable as to be unable to observe Sunday rest or to have any margin of wealth or leisure to give free play to their natural benevolence. Christian wisdom invites earnest efforts at improving their lot.

At the International Conference Catholics will have occasion to bear witness to one of their strong convictions. Birth-control advocates will take advantage of the occasion to spread their nefarious doctrine and to seek support for their vicious practices. Their persons are to be loved ; their errors are hateful and should be countered by all possible means. They will be challenged and checked by Catholic delegates ; in particular it would be intolerable that these apostles of a sorry modernity should impose their view that the birth-control problem has no ethical implications.

At times people are liable to talk as if the Catholic attitude were a matter of church discipline like Sunday observance or fasting rules, whilst it is a principle of universal ethics, that holds good for Catholics and non-Catholics. The only thing peculiar to the Catholic Church in this matter is that it is the only institution that has clear ideas about it and has the courage to face unpopularity in proclaiming them.

### *Among Ourselves*

It is expected that Catholic social workers will profit by the occasion to have meetings of their own in a more homely style. Delegates from all provinces and from different countries will be present, to share conclusions of parallel experiments and consolidate parallel resolutions in an international solidarity of faith and effort. The more internationalism becomes an economic reality, the greater the need of putting Catholic social endeavour on a world-scale provided it be based on realistic achievements.

### *Action*

Occasionally social workers who are in earnest feel impatient of meetings, discussions and lectures. What is the use of all that talk ?, they say ; let us have action.

They should reflect that talk is both a preparation for action and a humble form of action. It is surely action to convince, persuade, decide, encourage others, create common consciousness, and spread the idea of solidarity and community. Action also the spoken and written word which discusses plans, harmonises effort, and tests results of realistic undertakings. Talk is futile if it be insincere, unrelated to facts or irresponsible. Resolutions are useless if not carried into effect ; they even point to intellectual or moral bankruptcy. But the doers of the word are always worth hearing : their words are wings of action.

### *Community Projects*

One would have expected unanimous effort at village uplift and, at worst, rivalry in effort between the various parties. Yet our Red fellow-citizens remain true to form; they will mope, criticize, obstruct. With impenitent Marxism they oppose anything and everything that falls short of their objective. Relief and rehabilitation of the 1952 peasantry is no objective of theirs; it would at best be a means to get at their ultimate political revolution. That is why when they met the Planning Commission, they did not, like the other parties, ask for explanations, but profited by the occasion only to argue their case.

On the other hand, clever tacticians as they are, they allowed only a few leaders to come forward; these could be denounced if they failed to advance the cause, they could be outbidden if they succeeded. In any case the game must go on; any failure in the community projects will be magnified, results decried, and ridicule will be showered on the whole plan. An atmosphere of uncertainty and agitation is the most suitable climate for a Red Revolution.

### *The Red Nucleus*

The Red peril is ever present, whatever be said about the features of Indian mentality and tradition. It may develop into a mortal danger in either of the two possible ways: a *coup d'état* or an electoral landslide. Little time is left to counter it effectively. In both alternatives the strength of the communist endeavour will come from the intellectuals who are frustrated with to-day's realities and feel attracted by the ideal communist propaganda evolves for the unwary. These intellectuals are the key-people that need enlightenment and training, and that will command the allegiance of the masses. They will not make their choice between different sets of goods and gadgets; they will choose between ideals and causes. Sound doctrine is more imperative than ever.

A. L.

## SOME RECENT STRIKES

We have witnessed three important strikes during the last few months in the Bombay State. Not all of them can be called strikes in the strict sense of the term. One of them was more in the nature of a lock-out by management than a strike. However, since the labour movement in this country is still in the process of formation, a brief outline and review of each of these phenomena will serve as excellent illustrations of the major trends at work in the Indian labour world.

### *The Air India Lay-Off*

Technically called a lay-off, the management of Air-India really resorted to a lock-out when it gave nearly 2000 men notice of complete stoppage of work. This was meant to be management's answer to the go-slow policy of the workmen who were deeply dissatisfied with the decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal in favour of Management. Nearly two years ago, the Sen Award had been partially welcomed by the workmen. They had been allowed their increments; the surplus number of hands threatened with retrenchment were to be absorbed. But the Company had appealed against the judgement. And soon after, the employees had done the same because the Award had failed to satisfy all their demands. This is invariably the case in India. The Industrial Courts take time and money, and the party that is not favoured in the verdict always tries to circumvent the award either by appealing against it, or where this is not possible, by safeguarding its interests in some other way. And though the matter might be settled temporarily, no final solution is possible unless labour and management agree to a single formula satisfactory to both. But this is extremely hard to hammer out in the law courts.

### *The Air-India Unions*

There are four unions in Air-India, the most numerous



being the Air-India Employees' Union and the Ground Engineers' Union. When the employees have to treat with management, representatives from the four unions get together as a Liaison Committee and then hold discussions. There is also a Work's Committee made up of employees' and management's representatives.

### *Communists*

The misfortune of the Air-India workmen's unions and Liaison Committee was their dominance by a small coterie of Communists. These men got into power by sheer hard work and skilful manoeuvring, while the rest of the workmen, among whom there are several hundred Catholics, preferred to sit back or were forced to do so and watch the prestige of the Communists increase by reason of their activity and opposition. The Communists faithfully followed the Marxian pattern of class warfare ever since they were installed in power. They completely resisted every overture of management to come to terms with the workmen. And at the same time they used the most unscrupulous tactics to keep their fictitious majority in the managing committee of the unions. It is they who made it impossible for the Work's Committee to settle down to producing anything positive.

But the decision of the Appellate Tribunal came as a severe blow to their prestige. The men were dissatisfied and restive. And a demonstration fostered behind the scenes by the Communists was staged against the management. But perhaps the Communists had bitten off more than they could chew. Management suddenly adopted a tough policy. A lock-out was their answer. Nearly 2000 men were laid-off for reasons of sabotage. Nearly 20 men were instantaneously discharged, among them 10 prominent Communist leaders. This sudden stoppage of work, the resultant inactivity, and the absence of a strike fund made it impossible for the men to hold out against the Company for any length of time. The management seemed to hold

the whip-hand. The more educated workmen began to realise that their leaders had made some serious mistakes. In the meantime the company would have nothing to do with the Liaison Committee, the majority of whose members were Communists or fellow-travellers. A few days after the lay-off the Company withdrew recognition of the Air-India Employees' Union. This made matters worse for the men since they had no representatives through whom they could contact or bargain with management.

The Lay-off was brought rapidly to an end when management proposed an amnesty by recalling all the men back to work except those who had been given notices of discharge. The Communists had been feeling the growing hostility towards their party and their policy and shrewdly advised the men to go back to work, hoping to make up for lost prestige by controlling the union from outside the works, and through their stooges from within. The Anti-Communist element among the workers was neither sufficiently organised nor sure of its lead to challenge the Communists or replace them.

### *Lack of Interest*

What gave the Communists their chance was the fact that the vast majority of the workmen are not at all interested in trade-unionism. Workmen are apathetic and just too busy with their individual concerns to realise that they could vastly improve their situation if they were to stand together and follow the right leaders. Union meetings are not to their taste, and they will only attend when some serious issue arises or their jobs are at stake. They are content to follow Communist leadership, because they wish to take it easy and because they are ignorant of the real motives and aims of the Communists.

What is more pitiable is the fact that to a certain extent they are fellow travellers. Much of the Marxian dogma of the inevitable conflict of classes is deeply ingrained in

their minds. For them any kind of co-operation with management is suspect. Certainly management is partly to blame for bringing about such a situation, since many of the workmen have grievances against the company, and have received no redress, despite their efforts to seek it. As long as such cases remain, management can never hope to win the confidence or the sympathy of their workmen. And though the company may have succeeded in getting rid of the most important Communists leaders, the sense of injustice still prevails among the workmen and serves to fan their brooding enmity for management.

### *The Tribunal*

On the other hand it seems to be a sad fact that at least to outward appearances the procedure in conducting the case in the Appellate Tribunal gave workmen grave reasons to suspect the impartiality of the judges. It is difficult to give credence to such impressions as reported by workingmen who were present during the trial. But these grievances rankle in the mind and the judges must be blamed for having created them, when they could easily have avoided giving cause for any interpretations of the sort by absolute impartiality on their part.

### *Communist power*

Finally it must be admitted that the Communists so far ruled the roost in the Air-India unions. They had the best speakers, the hardest workers, and organising capacity. Their leaders were highly educated men, and were trained in all the tactics of gerrymandering and filibustering to make the unions do their will. But they hadn't bargained for the company's tough policy, and for the fact that the labour legislation in this country is not so much in favour of labour as most people seem to imagine. The presence of an active, slowly growing minority of bitter anti-Communists within the ranks of Air-India's workmen made their position less secure.

It is always a puzzle to understand how middle class men who are well educated and with ample means should become Communists. The explanation is possibly that there is a hunger of the body and a hunger of the soul. Communism not only promises wealth and abundance to the physically hungry; it also offers the hungry in spirit a 'vision', an ideal to achieve. To the educated man who steps out of our universities today, life has not much meaning. It appears to him as a confused process of events, bringing him both happiness and pain, but he fails to understand the meaning of its bewildering pattern of good fortune and ill. His mind has little hold if any at all on the spiritual side of human existence; he has never been given a clear-cut philosophy of life, an outlook on the world as a whole, a *weltanschauung*. But he finds this in Communism, even if its fundamental principles are materialistic. And his hunger is partly satisfied. It is only perhaps after years of travel in this spiritual desert that he suddenly awakens to the fact that he has been chasing illusions and that his soul is still a void aching for fulfilment.

### *The Awards*

Recently the Industrial Courts have come in for a large share of criticism from the Labour Minister of the Central Government. Mr. Giri would much prefer to suppress the industrial tribunals and get management and labour to settle their differences among themselves. There seems to be some reason for his contention, since in the present instance, the Sen Award has been completely reversed by the decision of the Labour Appellate Tribunal. The increments claimed by the men and allowed by the Sen Award will not be paid. The former retrenchment by the Company of the 124 men is admitted to be justified because the company is burdened by surplus staff and is suffering financial losses. Indeed the recent lay-off gave the company a chance to retrench a few more men.

But the point is whether such complete reversals of previous judgements cannot be called into question by the parties to the dispute. Mr. Sen thought that the management was partly to blame for the high cost of the firm. He contended that if management could cut down the cost of certain items by increasing inter-departmental efficiency which was feasible they could easily save over a lakh of rupees every month, just sufficient to cover the increase in the wage bill due to increments. Moreover the Air-Transport Inquiry had stated that the company had five Dakotas too many and one Skymaster which was not being used. Much money had been invested in procuring large quantities of spares for replacements in aircraft. Why should Labour suffer if the fault for excessive costs lay at management's door?

Mr. Lakshmana Rao, the latest adjudicator, contended however that the company had been making losses for the last three years, that though the company had made the initial mistake of buying five Dakotas too many, these were not a serious loss to the company as they could be put to use any day. He further maintained that no amount of inter-departmental efficiency could ever bring about savings out of which the increments could be paid. The high cost of depreciation was absolutely necessary in view of the increasing competition both within and without the country and the high prices of the latest flying models. The Air-Transport Inquiry Committee had held the high costs within the firm to be the result of surplus-staff and high wages. Mr. Rao concurred and therefore decided that the increments had to be stopped and the number of staff decreased.

### *Other Alternatives*

Despite the arguments *pro* and *contra* the retention of staff and the payment of increments, the fact remains that there are other alternatives to those suggested by the Air-Transport Inquiry Committee and the latest award. The management often complained during the course of the

proceedings that they could not increase their operations because of government interference and control. They had built up their staff and invested in flying equipment to cover an average of 50,000 flying hours a year. Instead they were now not allowed to exceed 30,000. They had expected to carry the night air mails, but the government had given the contract to another company.

However it is a fact that the possibilities for air travel are on the increase. Perhaps now that the first class on the Railways has been suppressed, many more passengers might be induced to travel by air. Communications in this country are still few and far between. The country is so vast that to cover the land with a sufficient network of railways will take much time and money. But perhaps the government has a vested interest in the railways. The Rs. 40 crores profit made by the Railways last year might dwindle down to a loss, if the air lines were allowed to compete more freely with rail communication. This is however a distant threat; government could certainly be more liberal in its policy towards the air companies.

But the Tatas have quite enough of other interests to solve the unemployment problem in one particular branch of their industrial undertakings. They could easily offer the retrenched men alternative employment in some other of their factories. This should not be too difficult. In a general way, if a company suffers losses, these should be equally divided between the topmost grades of pay and the lowest fringe of salaried workmen. It is not fair to sack the latter while the former continue to enjoy their high standard of income and comfort. Let the sacrifice be equally divided. After all, the firm is a single unit working for a single end, and unless the workman is made to feel that his firm stands or falls with him, no amount of toughness with the Communists is going to achieve anything. The problem of the industrial world is deeper than merely ridding it of Communistic influence. The Communists may go but the

circumstances that produced and maintained them in power remain, and until these are eradicated, no firm can ever enjoy peace and stability, or gain the loyalty of its workmen.

(To be continued)

A. Fonseca

## JESUIT COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The Jesuits were founded in 1540 ; in 1549 they had landed in Brazil and by 1588 they were canoeing up the endless Rio de la Plata to go and work among the Guaranis of Southern Brazil and Paraguay. These aboriginals of South America had a gruesome reputation. Travellers said they were wild savages, even cannibals ; not that they ate each other, but they felt at their best when banqueting on prisoners of guerilla warfare. The Jesuits had a better look at them and depicted the Guaranis as gentle, tractable and readily amenable to organisation. Cruelty in the jungle is born of fear which leads to senseless reprisals ; the Jesuit approach was one of disinterested sympathy which wore down all apprehension. In order to make sure their method would succeed, they made it a condition that "no white settler, not even a Spaniard would enter the Guarani territory ;" the King of Spain agreed and in 1602 the Jesuits established their first colony, called "Loretto," at Asuncion. A few decades later there were some thirty such colonies, one of 8,000 people, most of them numbering only some 3,000 Guaranis. All told, the Jesuit "Republic" was a modest community involving 150,000 people scattered over 200 square miles.

A strange fate attended these Jesuit community projects. Catholic authors criticised them severely, Protestants praised them to the sky. Those Catholics were in alliance with Spanish Capitalists who had lost their chance of exploiting

the aboriginals; the Protestants sided with English politicians with whom any stick will do to beat the Spanish dog, even if he is not called Franco. Leaving the detailed history of the Paraguay settlement to properly equipped specialists, it will be sufficiently objective to rely on the summary description of Mr Charles Gide, the French Huguenot who confessed he had no particular reason to be sympathetic towards Jesuits.

The Guarani townships had their administration modelled on Spanish municipalities: mayors, councillors, executive officers, police chief and public prosecutor. The *corregidor* (chief executive) was appointed by the Spanish governor of the province, the other officials were elected by the people, though it is likely that more than once the advice of the Parish-priest had a decisive weight. Occasionally he vetoed elections and exercised a supervision that was not entirely spiritual. The system can be best described as a democracy toned down with paternalism. Whether raw democracy would have succeeded with the Guaranis who were illiterate and unprogressive and who had been governed in former times by dictatorial *caciques* is very doubtful. The township remained under the authority of the Spanish Kings and of the provincial governor. The governor was interested only in the tax being paid, and the King was satisfied with distant blessings on the enterprise. In any case the Guaranis of the Jesuit settlements had little to complain of when comparing their condition with the fate of other Spanish colonies. They paid a nominal tax which amounted to only one-fifth of what was paid elsewhere, and only men between twenty-two and fifty were taxable. The tax did not suffice to cover administrative expenses which did not in any case include the upkeep of the Jesuit missionaries; these who usually were two in each station, an elderly parish-priest and a young curate who learned the language and journeyed about, had to be provided for by particular bounties of the Spanish crown. The Guaranis were also privileged in the matter of military service. In



theory they would have had to supply a small contingent of men, had the Spanish King required their services, but they were called to the colours only two or three times in the course of a century and a half. Once a week, however, there was a military exercise which looked like a parade for the entertainment of civilians rather than a training for commando service.

Of greater interest was the economic regime. Was it communism as is occasionally said, communism of that voluntary small-size type as obtains in monasteries? It was not; one should rather call it co-operativism. Each family had its own house, each was entrusted with a field which was large enough for its needs and which it cultivated as best as it could. On the other hand, houses and lands were assigned to each for use and not for ownership; they were granted free but could be taken away in case the family would cease to cultivate the field any longer or to occupy the house. Ownership was closely associated with work and production. Besides the fields allotted to individual families, there was land reserved for the whole community. This land was called "God's Field", and its produce went to support the aged, cripples, orphans, etc. It was cultivated by groups of children or when necessary by requisitioned adult labour. Agriculture was limited to two crops: maize and cotton. Town planning was simple and uniform. All the villages were built on the same pattern: a square in the middle, houses on three sides of the square, the church and public store-rooms on the fourth.

A distinctive feature of the economic regime was the absence of trade. There was only one public shop or store-house in which the produce of God's field was garnered and from which it was sold or distributed. There was no individual shop-keeper; private trade for profit was eliminated and accumulation of capital was precluded by reserving houses to actual occupiers and fields to cultivators.

The public store-room was used also for commodities brought from outside. There was little external trade and it was carried on a co-operative basis. The needs of the settlers were simple and hardly went beyond what was produced on the spot. Yet as there were no iron or copper mines, tools and utensils had to be fetched far away. Year after year a trade caravan took the long road to Buenos Ayres or Santa Fe. The delegates were picked for their neighbourly sense rather than for their business acumen since nobody was a trader by profession. During their long absence their fields were looked after by the community. The horses of the caravan were loaded with a little tobacco, some cotton goods and hides, but especially with maté, the famous leaves which had been plucked from jungle trees and which still make the national "tea" of South America. In Buenos Ayres or Santa Fe the goods were sold; with the proceeds the provincial tax was paid, and church ornaments, metal goods, particularly tools and musical instruments were bought. Little was required, for the cottage industries in the settlements were limited to spinning and weaving. Money was regarded as a curio rather than as a medium of exchange; there was no currency, no banks, no savings scheme. The little communities lived on the simplest of styles as would have charmed Gandhiji.

Were the people contented? From all available accounts they were. They certainly had all that simple folks could desire. Nearly every Sunday they had dramatic performances and staged plays which were reminiscent of the "miracle plays" so popular in medieval Europe. They also gave a good deal of attention and time to music. Not only was community-singing a favourite pastime but all manners of concerts with all kinds of wood, copper or stringed instruments enlivened their gatherings. There was even dancing; as this noble art was not in the training curriculum of Jesuits, a professional dancing-master had to be engaged; he was the only Spaniard admitted into the settlement.

The teacher was so good and the pupils so apt that the Guarani repertoire counted as many as seventy dances.

What contributed most to the general happiness was the high standard of Christian morality which was maintained in the colonies. No crime, no murder, no misdemeanour; a system of close supervision prevented the lapses of the weak and brought to book the occasional delinquents. Another note-worthy feature of Guarani mentality was the ease with which offenders readily confessed their guilt in public and submitted to the punishment which was usually the whip. According to C. Gide, they regularly indulged in such confessions; he even calls it a mania. Undoubtedly abuses crept in since public confessions were forbidden in the case of women. But the excesses tended only to prove that the Guaranis experienced a desire of inner purification and external atonement, which simple souls of the wilds can develop and which is little understandable to people of "higher" civilisations. The delinquents used to kiss the hand of the executioner, saying: "May God reward you for saving me by this light punishment from the eternal torment which I have deserved"; a prayer which reveals a spirit of other-worldliness few moderns would fancy in "savages." Even as late as the nineteenth century soft-spoken Renan was blunt enough to exclaim: "I do not see why a Papuan should have an immortal soul." The Jesuits of Paraguay knew better and they realised that the Kingdom of Heaven is for the little ones. They have left on record that in settlements years passed without a grievous sin being committed.

Are we then to say the Paraguay Jesuits had built up a Utopia? or that their policy was the best possible? It would be presumptuous to give a firm answer, since the documents that would have supplied the necessary data were destroyed or scattered. There are, indeed, a few posers. Was it a sound policy to keep the schooling at a primary level? How is it that in the many decades the

settlements lasted, apparently no Guarani was ever educated to the priesthood? Were attempts made in that line? Was the distrust of Guarani improvidence overdone? In the long run was it wise to keep the people in their primitive simplicity and in isolation from the big wide world? With the records destroyed, one can hardly surmise what was in the mind of the policy-makers. All we know is that the Guaranis of Paraguay lived contented; no destitution, no financial worries, an even tenor of life which responded to the classical *aurea mediocritas*. We also know that the settlements did not perish because of maladministration or any inherent deficiency. They were destroyed by brute capitalism. They had enemies in the slave-dealers of South America. In 1629 the Portuguese of Sao Paulo led a military expedition which plundered, slaughtered or captured the non-resistant Guaranis. The Jesuits then asked for permission to train a little defence army which repelled the 1630 attack; but a century later, it was badly defeated by a superior force of Portuguese and Spanish slave-dealers; seven missions were sacked and the settlers dispersed into the forests. The ruin was consummated in the following decades; the Jesuits were expelled from Portugal and Spain and from South-American possessions. The Fathers were led away and shipped to Italy and the settlers scattered in the wilds. Of the colonies there remained only the ruins of churches and the undying gratitude of the Guarani tribe which has survived to this day.

The Paraguay colonies were unique community projects. They were planned as a protection for primitive tribes and were peopled with aboriginals only; they were not intended to evolve a new type of society. They lasted one century and a half and disappeared only when destroyed by outsiders.

Other settlements were made in North America, some under Christian aspiration, others with social idealism. The Christian settlements were made with European im-

migrants; several lasted nearly as long as the Paraguay colonies but decayed from internal deficiencies. On record are the colonies of Shakers (English Puritans), Perfectionists of Oneida (Americans), Inspirationists and Harmonists (Germans), Dukhobors (Orthodox Russians), etc. All were dominated by religious ideals which grew dim after the founder's death and gradually vanished in the course of successive generations. Equally worthy of note are the community projects which were devised as attempts to build up a new type of civic society. Owenite colonies (Scotland), and Fourierist settlements (Mexico, France, U. S. A.) were short-lived. The most famous were the Icarian colonies launched by Etienne Cabet, a French journalist of the mid-nineteenth century, who set out to embody the utopia of his novel, *Journey to Icaria*, in economic organisations. The attempts were heroic, even though the economy was not altogether communistic; but the settlements never lasted very long (Texas, 3 months; Nauvoo 7 years; Cheltenham, 6 years; Corning, 18 years; Icarian community, 8 years; Icaria Speranza 3 years; New Icaria, 20 years.). One cannot argue that they were economic failures thought outside funds had often to be called for. The sources of their decay were rather of a moral nature; democracy was to be absolute and this led to oppositions and dissensions, but, according to Cabet himself, what ruined his plans was the instinctive craving of man for private property, which he wanted to rule out completely.

Similar conclusions come out of the reports of recent efforts at communistic life (New Llano in the U. S. A.; the Sunrise Community and the Farm Security Administration efforts in the U. S. A. the Ejido in Mexico, the Kvutza in Palestine, the Kolhhoz in Russia). In all cases after a few years or even after a few months, the pioneering enthusiasm dwindles down and at the founder's death it dies out, individualism reappears followed by dissension of hearts and division of properties, unless outside pressure keeps up

the flame longer as in Palestine or unless governmental tyranny maintains normal tendencies in check.

The only communities which survived through several generations had all a high spiritual inspiration and a certain disdain for earthly wealth. This historical fact brings out one of the inner contradictions of communism. Communism holds as an axiom that matter is the only thing that matters. But matter and everything material cannot be really shared; in the best of cases it can be suitably divided. Anything that is to be held in common must be spiritual or in some way spiritualised, it must lose its importance as material wealth so that nobody is keen on appropriating it for his well-being or his security. Bodily needs must be made little of as it were, and spiritual pursuits must engross the attention so that it matters little to any member of the community who gets hold of this or that. Detachment from things material, which involves a certain disappropriation, is necessary to give some play to the interest of others in these very same things. Other-worldliness must be vivid enough if this world is to be given its real importance and material wealth allowed to play its social function. Make matter the one and only thing that matters and you abandon it to the selfish cravings of men.

*A. Lallemand*

## HOUSING

Presiding over the all India Industrial Housing conference held at Delhi in August 1952, the Union Minister of Central Works, Housing and Supply remarked : " Ultimately this movement should embrace the whole country -not confined to towns and cities alone and reach practically every village." The pronouncement is, indeed, welcome, and every citizen of the Union will agree that housing in general and not only industrial housing in particular, is a problem of serious urgency. In fact, the tragedy of our age is that, while the most advanced scientific principles of engineering and architecture are applied in the construction of edifices to house our Banks, Commercial Offices and even factories and warehouses, the dwellings of our people are allowed to continue in a condition little worthy of human dignity. The Prime Minister of the Union Government expressed the same concern when, early in March 1952, at the opening of a Dyes and Pharmaceutical factory at Parnera, he said : " I just wonder how the industrialist who finds money for several things finds no money for housing labour. It is a difficult problem, but if the Government and industry cooperate much can be done."

This does not mean that industrial housing has not, from time to time, drawn the attention of those concerned. An Industrial Commission in 1918, and later, the Royal Commission on Labour investigated the problem of industrial housing. Again, in 1945 the Government of India appointed a Health Survey and Development Committee. Their Report published in 1946 gives a good over-all picture of housing conditions in the country at that period, and in many instances, that same picture is true of housing conditions which obtain in India of 1952. " We are not satisfied," says the Report, " with the housing conditions prevailing in any of the places we visited. Over crowding is a feature common to all these centres. Further, the hygienic

condition of the houses and their surroundings is, in most cases, very unsatisfactory" (Vol. I, p. 80). Speaking of our rural areas and the complete indifference of many major municipalities towards the enforcement of laws against over-crowding, the Report says, "In rural areas, houses are without water supply and latrines; lighting is inadequate or non-existent; many are in a state of disrepair and without ventilation... There are laws in the major municipalities dealing with the prevention of over crowding and the observance of elementary rules of hygiene; and they also exist in some of the enactments relating to smaller municipalities. But the authorities have shown little or no interest in their enforcement; and very few local bodies have attempted to control or to encourage the development of housing on proper lines in urban areas..... There is practically no control of rural housing throughout the country. (Vol. II., p. 233.).

Although, and most unfortunately, the recommendations and suggestions made by the Report (1946) of the Industrial Housing Subcommittee of the Standing Labour Committee of the Government of India had to be abandoned owing to financial difficulties, the minimum housing standards recommended for a married industrial worker are worth keeping in view in any discussion on a policy for housing. For this type of worker the Report recommended: (i) two rooms with a combined total floor area of not less than 240 square feet. (ii) in height, no part of the structure to be less than ten feet from the floor to the lowest part of the ceiling. (iii) a verandah on one side of the building and not less than seven feet in width. (iv) a kitchen with a chimney and space to store food and fuel. (v) an independent bathroom. (vi) a lavatory. (vii) window-space in each room to be equal to at least ten per cent of the floor-area of the room. In order to provide adequate drainage, twenty such houses should be built on an acre of land, and this would constitute a unit. These units should



be built around a civic centre which would provide schools, parks, a hospital and shopping centre. The cost of each permanent house conforming to the above specifications was estimated at between Rs. 3,500 and Rs. 5,000. The very comprehensive aim of the National Planning Commission included, as one may expect, a preliminary industrial housing plan. According to its estimate more than a million houses were required for workers employed in large industries alone, excluding all those employed in small-scale industries, urban wage-earners and those engaged in the distributive trades. The Planning Commission, however, modified slightly the minimum standard family accommodation recommended by the Industrial Housing Subcommittee of the Standing Labour Committee in 1949, "so as to furnish each family with separate accommodation containing one living room (12'  $\times$  10'), a verandah, a kitchen (8'  $\times$  10'), a bath and a latrine and provision for adding another room when resources permitted" (*Supplement to Capital*, December 20, 1951).

But necessity knows no law, and while departmental administration was busy studying housing plans and estimating costs, the country woke up to the distressing fact, that after partition in August 1947, the Indian Union was faced with millions of evacuees seeking food, clothing and shelter! Perhaps, it is not well realised, even today, how magnificently the country rose to meet this emergency, despite its general poverty and limited resources. The housing of displaced persons alone is an indication of what can be done when the will and determination are not lacking. The rehabilitation of evacuees has meant not only the construction of new houses, but the establishment of entire townships in various parts of the country. The following Table from *The Rehabilitation Review of May-August 1950*, shows the progress made up to 31st August, 1950, hardly three years after partition, in the housing schemes for urban displaced persons.

State	Units completed.			Units under construction.		
	1 Houses.	Tenements.	Total.	Houses.	Tenements.	Total.
Bombay	822	6378	7200	480	1650	2130.
Delhi	3170	9688	12858	616	2933	3549.
Kutch (Kandai)	1524	576	2091	678	760	1438.
Madhya Bharat	600	—	600	220	—	220.
Madhya Pradesh	3213	—	3213	2689	—	2689.
Pepsu	3086	509	3586	382	—	382.
Punjab	6103	15326 <sup>2</sup>	21429	870	—	870.
Rajasthan	603	—	603	697	—	697.
Saurashtra	405	—	405	100	—	100.
Uttar Pradesh	7479	—	7479	815	—	815.
West Bengal	913	—	913	900	—	900.
<b>TOTAL</b>	... 27918	32459	60377	8447	5343	13790.

Notes : 1. 'House' here means an independent residential unit with one or more rooms and provided with kitchen, bath and lavatory ; 'Tenements' are single-roomed units normally with common baths and lavatories.

2. Single-room mud huts costing about Rs. 300 each.

Though the Rehabilitation Housing Scheme was devised to meet a national emergency, those who have visited rehabilitation centres and townships will agree that the design of both houses and tenements compare very favourably with other housing schemes drawn up in more happy times. In the Delhi Scheme, single-room tenements provide one main living room of 14 feet by 10 feet, with a verandah of 7 feet in front, together with a bath and latrine for every two tenements and a low walled-in court yard. These buildings have been so constructed that at any time, two tenements may be combined to give a good size two-roomed house. This type of building has been put up for people who are unable to build their own houses, and the rent varies from Rs. 12 as for tenements at Kotla Ferose-shaha to Rs. 10 for those at Azadpur. Single-storey, one-room tenements of this type are less likely to become per-

manent slums than those of the two and three storeyed type which are built in some major Indian cities, and which have already been converted into slumdom. The ordinary houses provided for in the Delhi Scheme are usually of two rooms, though there are structures which contain three rooms and even double-storeyed houses providing self-contained flats. In the two-room structures for low income earners, each room measures 12 feet by 10 feet, and has a kitchen, a bathroom, a verandah both in front and at the back and a walled-in court yard. These are fine semi-detached buildings very like the bungalow pattern and are normally meant for people who have the means to purchase houses from the Government at cost price. The specifications of these houses compare very favourable with those recommended by the Planning Commission. From the above Table giving the number of houses and tenements built or under construction for urban displaced persons, it will be seen that more houses than tenements have been built and planned. This stress on houses rather than on tenements is most welcome, especially to all social workers who have had occasion to work in the "chawls" and "cherries" which disfigure so many of our great cities, and in which overcrowding and insanitary conditions of living render these establishments a danger to public health and morality.

The achievements of the Rehabilitation Housing Scheme augur well for the successful operation of any future housing scheme when its difficulties and obstacles are estimated. Before a single structure could be erected there were many important problems to be solved: financial resources had to be estimated and guaranteed; suitable localities for houses and townships had to be found; land had to be acquired and developed so as to provide every facility for easy communications, water-supply and good drainage; the pattern of houses and townships had to be planned and designed to the last detail, and finally, building material and equipment had to be acquired and distributed on a priority basis. In general, the housing schemes were planned and

implemented by State Governments in accordance with the general policy laid down by the Union Government. Long term loans were advanced to the State Government. and quotas of scarce building materials were allotted according to the requirements of the various constructions. In many instances, land for building purposes had to be acquired through passing the necessary legislation, and then developed so that it could be rendered fit for building purposes. In other cases and when the land was owned by the Government, it was often given outright on the payment of suitable occupancy prices. The actual work of land development and the construction of houses was carried through by P. W. Department; other agencies included the local authorities and the Improvement Trust Committees where such organisations existed, and the Cooperative Housing societies. In this way a national crisis was successfully met and overcome, and few will deny that in the context of the nation's welfare and prosperity, the housing problem, today, is one of national importance.

The appalling damage done to the State by inadequate housing is sufficient to raise the whole problem of housing to one of national importance. In fact, the welfare of the State, ultimately depends on the welfare of each and every family on its territory, and a necessary element for the welfare of every family is good and adequate housing. No thinking individual can escape feeling deep concern and anxiety about the type of our citizens of tomorrow, when today there are thousands of children in the country who do not know, and perhaps, have never known the privacy of a good home, which is the first and natural training ground of the citizen! There is no need to invoke the authority of our social statisticians to prove, that in most large cities, and in many smaller towns there are large sections of the population who have no shelter or resting place at night, except such as they find along our roads and streets; that there are others who enjoy a makeshift protection in narrow, insanitary, dirty hovels constructed of bamboo, tin sheets and often thatched with old rags;

that the built-up permanent slums of our large cities are the breeding ground of sickness and disease; that the children condemned to such man-made subhuman living conditions are handicapped at the very start of life and have little or no opportunity to develop into good and useful citizens. That such conditions exist is evil enough, but the tragedy deepens when these conditions are accepted by many, as being the normal conditions of society, and this conviction tends to grow due to the long continuance of such evils! It is within the author's experience that, not unfrequently, children and even adults long accustomed to living in slum conditions, without adequate sanitation, ventilation and room-space find it difficult to settle down in good and healthy housing conditions; they feel lost when provided with the required room-space for healthy living, they are innocent of the most elementary knowledge of sanitation and hygiene and unless carefully helped tend to fall back into methods of living which conform to slum conditions. That is the depth of the tragedy and danger which threatens the future generation of a nation, in which the greater part of its population suffers from insufficient and inadequate housing conditions.

(To be continued)

C. C. Clump.



## COMMUNIST POLICY IN INDIA

(Continued)

### *Further Details on Land Reform*

While the CPI intends making use of Tenancy and Land Reform Acts, such measures must not be considered as the ultimate solution. Why? "The point is that the colonial feudal economy has reached such an acute phase of its crisis that no solution is possible within the frame-

*work of this economy*; you solve one problem here and immediately another problem arises there; nay more, the very solution of one problem here gives rise to another problem there."<sup>23</sup> What then is the fundamental solution? The answer is "the abolition of landlordism, distribution of land to the landless and land-hungry peasants, cancellation of agrarian debts, emancipation of agricultural economy from the clutches of imperialists and other measures to reorganise our rural economy."<sup>24</sup> Of such paramount importance is this solution that "Agrarian Revolution has thus become not only a way forward for the landless, land-hungry and landlord-exploited masses but the only way forward for the entire nation, recognised and accepted even by enlightened sections of those exploiting classes who stand to lose by it."<sup>25</sup>

The anti-feudal nature of Communist land reforms gives rise to some interesting reflections and to some surprises. The Party now distinguishes: (1) the feudal landlord who merely collects rents and interests; (2) the capitalists land owner who, while not doing manual labour himself, carries on cultivation by means of hired labour; (3) the rich peasant who does manual labour and employs workers; all three classes owning over thirty acres.<sup>26</sup>

The Party considers it a tactical error to have it expelled the rich peasant from the kisan movement. Another manifestation of crude "leftism" within the Party was to attack capitalism along with feudalism. "Nobody had the vaguest idea that capitalism in agriculture, like capitalism in industry is an advance on the present situation in a semi-colonial, semi-feudal country."<sup>27</sup> Thanks to the enlightenment from on high as to the correct Marxist-Lenist thesis,

<sup>23</sup> Parameswaram, p. 34

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 35. cf. also p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> cf. E. M. S. Namboodripad, p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

the CPI now knows "the struggle in India today is not between capitalism and Socialism, but between imperialism and feudalism on the one hand and the mass of our people on the other; further that in this struggle capitalist economy, the capitalist class, has a role to play and that the mass of the people led by the working class can make use of it, provided they take all precautions that the capitalist elements are not allowed to drag the people into the arms of imperialism and feudalism."<sup>28</sup> And the Central Committee can now do what it failed to do before, namely, accept and apply the lessons of the Chinese Revolution which through its agrarian reforms, carrying out a policy of deliberately building a rich peasant economy which means nothing but promoting capitalism in agriculture."<sup>29</sup>

Consequent on the distinction between the feudalists and capitalists, the latter receive sympathy from strange quarters. Indeed the lot of the agrarian capitalists does not appear a happy one in communist eyes. Firstly, there is "a disproportionate increase in the taxes on the agricultural sector." "Secondly, there is a problem of fluctuations in prices..." These affect the big capitalist farmers and specially so in "a colonial country like India which produces raw materials and strategical goods, because it is the American and British financiers who manipulate the prices of these commodities."<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, the rich peasants have to pay heavy sums to get full proprietary rites by paying compensation to the zamindars. We get further insight into the reason of placating certain classes of landlords from a remark of S. Parameswaran: "It would be wrong on the part of the democratic movement to forget this distinction, lump landlords of all categories together and demand unrestricted and unconditional prohibition of eviction. For, it would enable the big landlords and their Government to rally the poor and medium landlords behind

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

the anti-peasant programme and thus extend the area of conflict. It is necessary that all efforts are made to rally the poor and medium landlords behind the programme of democratic changes in the existing Tenancy Act, without sacrificing the interests of the peasants."<sup>31</sup>

Putting an arbitrary limit, as the Socialist Party has done, of thirty acres, not only ignores the fact that certain types of farming can only be scientifically carried out on a large scale, but also "completely ignores the fact that large scale production even on capitalist lines is an advance not only on the present position but on small-scale production in general, since it will improve technique and lay the basis for a subsequent Socialist collectivisation. It ignores the fact that certain types of scientific farming can be done only on a large scale and that to put an upper limit to all forms — particularly at such a low level as 30 acres — will be a retrograde step in the development of cultivation."<sup>33</sup>

Briefly, the communist decision on the agrarian question is the abolition of feudal exploitation in its two main forms : interests and rent. The lands of all feudal landlords should be confiscated without compensation.<sup>34</sup> As for the capitalist landlords, where they have built up a monopoly, a certain limit will have to be put, but high enough to allow efficient cultivation. At present, no restriction at all should be put

<sup>31</sup> Pp. 48-49.

<sup>32</sup> *We Build for Socialism*, p.6.

<sup>33</sup> E. M. S. Namboodripad, p. 49.

<sup>34</sup> "Compensation is to be opposed not because its payment is wrong in principle (though, of course, there is no justification for it in principle either) but because its practical effect will be to saddle agriculture with so heavy a burden that it could not make all those advances that are necessary to improve its technique and increase its productivity." E. M. S. Namboodripad, p. 47.



on the holdings of rich peasants.<sup>35</sup> Since there is not enough land for all, even after confiscating the holdings of the feudal landlords and putting restrictions on those of the capitalist landlords, we are faced with the alternative "either give some land to everybody though the holding of each will be less than an economic holding; or give some people sufficient land to constitute an economic holding and leave the rest absolutely landless."<sup>36</sup> The solution is to give *all* some land. This is a surprising decision in the light of what has just been said of not cutting down the holdings of the capitalist landholders below an efficiency level. If all are to be given a bit of land this is evidently to increase fragmentation and all the evils attendant on it.<sup>37</sup> The reason for such a decision can only be the immense appeal the offer of some land must have to the landless peasant: soundness is sacrificed to Party ideology.

The conclusion to be drawn from the discussion on the agrarian policy is that while certain practical proposals can be made and organised efforts set afoot to put these proposals into execution, such measures are only stop-gaps and make-shifts because "colonial feudal economy has

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibid.* pp. 49-50. But in *The Programme*, p. 18, which is meant for popular consumption and to win votes, no such distinction between the various kinds of landlords is found. It is simply stated that the intention is "to hand over landlords' land without payment to the peasants including agricultural labourers and to legalise this reform in the form of a special land law and thus realise abolition of landlordism without compensation."

<sup>36</sup> E. M. S. Namboodripad, p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> The Communists followed a somewhat similar policy in Eastern Europe. In 1945 they began breaking up the feudal states and redistributing them among the peasants thus winning support from a sector of the peasantry. But the plots were so small that their new owners could not make a living out of them and so, after continual failure, they had no other choice then to put their livestock and lands in the collective farms.

reached such an acute phase that no solution is possible within the framework of this economy; you solve one problem here and immediately another problem arises there; nay more, the very solution of one problem here gives rise to another problem there.”<sup>38</sup> The complete change of the peasant agrarian system must be regarded as a programme of immediate and great urgency: to look upon these basic changes as an “ultimate programme” as distinct from “the immediate programme” will be wrong and dangerous. The practical solutions proposed for current problems must be a step along the way to the fundamental solutions of the basic problems. And these solutions are “the abolition of landlordism, distribution of land to the landless and land-hungry peasants, cancellation of agrarian debts, emancipation of agricultural economy from the clutches of imperialists and other measures to re-organise our rural economy.”<sup>39</sup>

### *Linguistic States*

The CPI's advocacy of these States seems to be based on the strategy of divide and rule for it would be easier for communists to capture one State at a time than to take over the whole country at once. Furthermore, besides the usual policy of exploiting a grievance, *v.g.*, the demand for an Andhra State, there is also the attempt to loosen the control of the Centre over the individual States. The expressions used in the *Programme* show how far the effort to bring about such a separation will go: “vast areas and millions of people of one nationality are compelled to live under the rule of bureaucrats and governments dominated by another nationality. Large tribal areas, with their own economy and culture are put at the mercy of the landlords and financial sharks of this or that alien group....”<sup>40</sup> In tribal areas where “the population is

<sup>38</sup> S. Parameswaran, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>40</sup> Pp. 9.

specific in composition... or constitutes a national minority" they will be given complete regional autonomy. The labelling of local and linguistic differences as the domination of one "nationality" over another is very significant; and the proposal also promises to be a happy hunting ground for Communist anthropologists sorting out the tribes of a specific composition. In a line with this policy, is the attack upon Hindi as the national language<sup>41</sup>; "In the name of a united country, the language of a part of the country, namely, Hindi, was declared an obligatory state language for all nationalities and states, to the detriment of their own national language".<sup>42</sup> The programme further lays down: "Right of people to receive instruction in their mother-tongue in educational institutions; the use of the national language of the particular state in all its public and state institutions; provision for the use of the language of a minority or region, where necessary, in addition to the national language. Use of Hindi as an all-India state language will not be obligatory. In Hindusthani-speaking areas, safeguard and protection to Urdu and Devnagri scripts and the right of the people to the use either of the two scripts."<sup>43</sup> It is again to be noted that by 'national' is not meant pertaining to the whole country, but linguistic and regional. This programme of autonomy for linguistic groups is very reminiscent of one of the few excursions into theory made by Stalin in his essay on *The Problems of Nationalities and Social Democracy*. As Commissar of Nationalities after the civil war, Stalin had to deal with sixty-five millions (out of the then Russian population of 140 million) who were of non-Russian nationalities. Eager to attract these peoples, Communists offered them all autonomy and selfgovernment, later to subject them to strict control from Moscow. In India, the

<sup>41</sup> Loc. cit. The anti-Hindi movement cannot be said to be of communist origin, but is ably exploited by them.

<sup>42</sup> Programme, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pp. 15-16.

unity and similarity between different peoples is far greater than that between the different peoples of the Soviet Union, but the fostering of local jealousies and the exploiting of claims, which have an appearance of reasonableness, for linguistic States, helps Communists to build up strong pockets of resistance. This will especially be the case if the Kerala State includes North Malabar, and the Andhra State includes Telengana; in which case, the Communists stand a good chance of getting a majority in these new States. The present support given to Kashmir is another example. Communists want this State to be loosely connected with the Centre, moreover, the fact that it has abolished the zemindari system without compensation makes them like to appear as the heroes of this act. The Communist *Cross Roads* writes in its editorial, July 27, 1952: "The issues in the Kashmir question are the issues common to the entire democratic movement. The new burdens being thrust on the people in every State in the recent budgets are forcing upon them the realisation that the Constitutions of India must be amended and that these States must have greater autonomy." Acting on the same policy, Communists join with other parties in putting pressure on the Central Government to allocate more revenue to the States and to allow States, like Madras and Cochin-Travancore, to have a share in the export revenues which are at present going to the Centre.

(To be continued)

A. Nevett

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